# Report on Progress

## ALBERTA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Alberta

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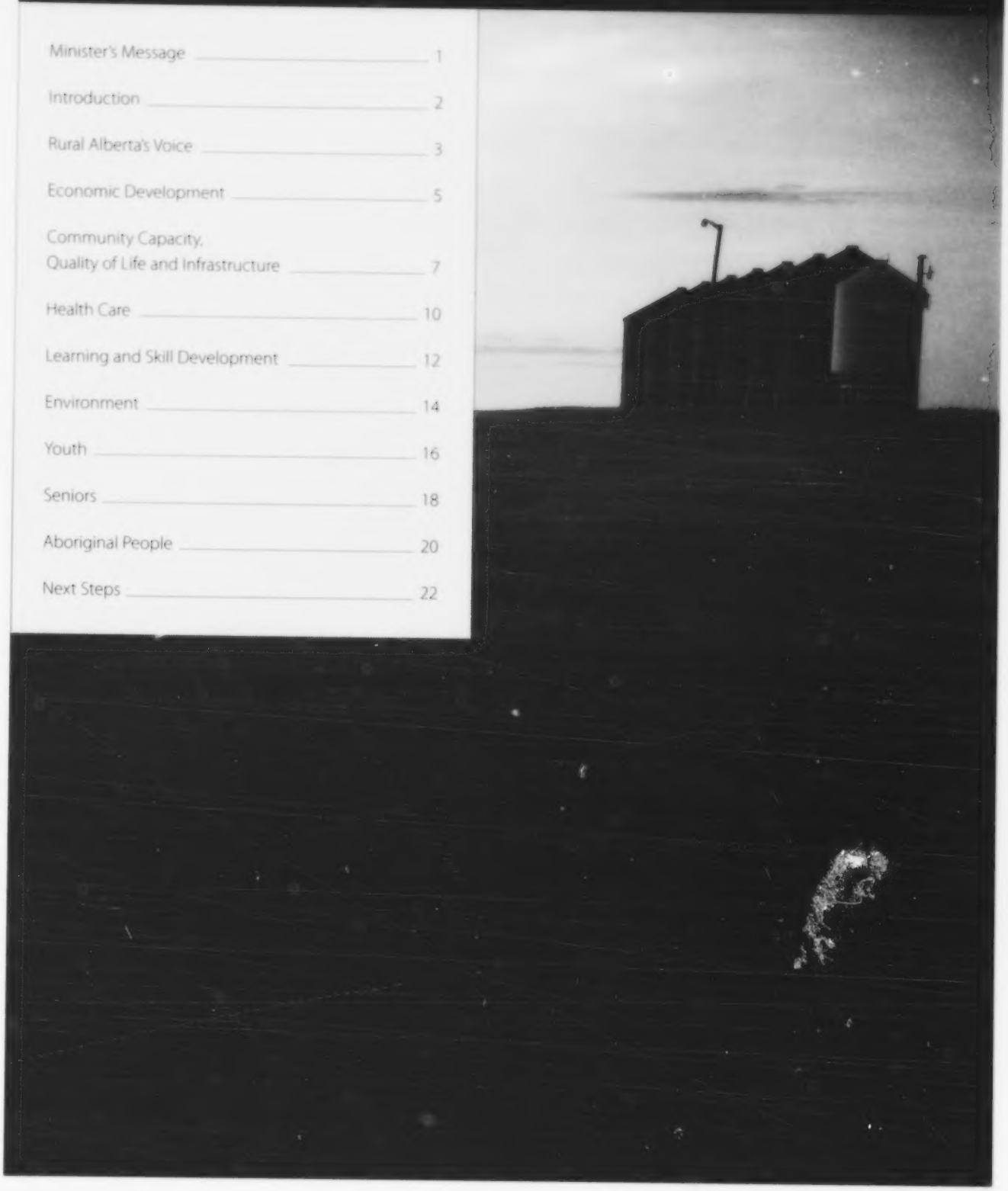


# Minister's Message

Rural Alberta is an important contributor to the growth, prosperity, and quality of life of all Albertans. Alberta's rural communities are vibrant, dynamic places that are driven by creativity and innovation. They are leading significant initiatives that add value to Alberta's overall economy. *A Place to Grow*, Alberta's Rural Development Strategy supports these communities in doing the great things they are doing.

The government is committed to working with rural communities to ensure they have the tools and environment necessary to prosper. A rural development strategy keeps the government focused.

*A Place to Grow* was the result of consultations with rural Albertans. It identified key areas that would develop and sustain aspects of rural communities. The Government of Alberta is committed to continuing to implement this strategy. Individual ministries have committed to support the strategy by implementing their own initiatives.

The following report highlights the work government has done to date in response to the priorities identified in *A Place to Grow*. It highlights some of the government's achievements in addressing the strategy's critical outcomes, including exciting new initiatives, like Rural Alberta's Development Fund. Government will continue to support rural Alberta, working together to build a stronger province.

Sincerely,

Iris Evans

Iris Evans
Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry

# Introduction

The Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of rural Alberta and its contributions to a prosperous province. It is committed to working with rural communities and all Albertans to foster a vibrant and sustainable Alberta.

*A Place to Grow*, completed in February 2005, outlines Alberta's rural development strategy with nine priority action areas. It reinforces the province's commitment to rural Alberta and focuses the provincial government's collective efforts on ensuring rural Albertans are able to contribute to and share in Alberta's prosperity and quality of life.

The desired outcomes of Alberta's Rural Development Strategy include:

- Creating a strong voice for rural Alberta
- Promoting economic development in rural communities
- Building community capacity
- Improving access to health care
- Expanding learning and skill development opportunities
- Sustaining and enhancing the quality of rural Alberta's environment
- Providing opportunities for rural youth
- Engaging and supporting seniors
- Encouraging participation of Aboriginal people

Since the completion of *A Place to Grow*, ministries across government have incorporated elements of the strategy into their business planning process and many have outlined significant rural development investments in their business plans and budgets. Many ministries have also had key initiatives supporting rural Alberta in place for some time.

This report highlights some of the Government of Alberta's contributions to achieving the outcomes and reiterates the province's commitment to supporting rural development and rural communities. Key actions and initiatives from the 2006-07 fiscal year are included as well as some significant programs and services already established.

The information in this document represents a snapshot in time. The Government of Alberta continues to move forward with programs and initiatives even in the time it has taken to publish this report. More information on individual items listed may be obtained by searching the Government of Alberta website. Additional information about programs and initiatives relating to rural development may also be accessed on individual ministry websites and found in annual reports.

# Rural Alberta's Voice

The voices of rural Albertans – their unique needs, issues and perspectives – need to be heard and addressed on an ongoing basis. They help shape government policy and set the course for the development of rural communities across the province. The provincial government is listening to the opinions and ideas of rural Albertans to help manage growth pressures, improve Albertans' quality of life, build a stronger Alberta, and provide safe and secure communities. A strong and healthy rural Alberta translates to a vibrant and prosperous province.

## Alberta's Progress

The Alberta government provided $100 million to Rural Alberta's Development Fund. It was established to support innovative, collaborative, community-focused projects specifically in the areas of economic growth; community capacity, quality of life and infrastructure; rural health delivery; and learning and skill development. The fund operates at arms length from the government.

A Ministerial Mountain Pine Beetle Advisory Committee was created with representatives from the forest industry, communities and municipalities. It provides advice to the Alberta government on forest community sustainability issues related to the Mountain Pine Beetle emergency. Several industry/government and community advisory committees were also established on operational planning for containment of the Mountain Pine Beetle and salvage of affected forest area.

A review of the Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) Program was conducted and identified several issues relating to program support, services and administration in small, rural communities. The FCSS Association Executive and the province will work with rural municipalities to identify options to resolve the issues and implement recommendations in 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Over a six-week period, the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities provincial task force consulted with stakeholder groups, community organizations, and the public in 14 rural and urban communities. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss crime, its causes, and successful strategies to reduce crime and enhance community safety. A symposium was held to share the feedback and discuss recommendations that will be used to develop a provincial crime reduction strategy.

The Vibrant Learning Communities strategic framework and actions were developed to increase support for community education and literacy programs across the province. Consultations with over 100 adult learning system stakeholders, the majority of which are rural-based, were held in May 2007 to validate the draft framework and prioritize actions prior to implementation.

A Strategic Planning Session for 4-H partners gave rural clients a voice in setting the direction of the program and suggesting how it can improve. The Alberta 4-H Council continues to be engaged in policy development and in developing future directions for 4-H programming.

As a result of the Agricultural Service Board (ASB) Program review undertaken in 2004-05, the ASB Provincial Committee was established to provide a collective voice for the 69 ASBs across the province. The committee helps identify and implement best practices and policy recommendations supporting municipalities, the agriculture industry, and rural Albertans in the management of agricultural land and resources.

The Oil Sands Multi-stakeholder Committee held a series of consultation sessions with Albertans last year on the development of the oilsands in northern Alberta. A consultation process is also taking place with First Nations and other Aboriginal communities. The committee's recommendations are expected this year.

In May of 2006 the Natural Gas in Coal Multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee released its final report and recommendations. The province is working to address the recommendations identified by stakeholders through the public consultation process, including those relating to water, land use, and best management practices.

The province continued to provide private registry agents with operational support, including advice on technical and policy issues, enabling rural residents to have direct access to registry services. These services include driver's license renewal; vehicle registration renewal; birth, death and marriage certificates; and personal property lien searches. There are currently 166 Registry Agents in 148 communities outside Edmonton and Calgary.

The province implemented an online business licensing system allowing businesses and charitable organizations in all areas of the province to renew their licenses and registration via the Internet.

## Website Speaks to Albertans

**Rural Albertans can now log on to www.services.gov.ab.ca, for easy access to online services. The government's newly-revised Programs & Services' website provides information on publications, forms, online services, programs, and initiatives.**

**Examples of topics include:**

**Businesses, Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations, Education and Training, Youth, Seniors, and Aboriginal People.**

**In addition, Albertans are encouraged to provide feedback on provincial government programs and services, through the website.**

## Challenge North 2006

**How do you advance development in northern, rural Alberta? That was the question addressed by Challenge North 2006, a conference held every three years in northern Alberta.**

**Last year, delegates from business, industry, and non-profit sectors met with government representatives from the federal, provincial, and municipal levels, to determine strategies to advance development in northern Alberta.**

**In 2006, the conference generated recommendations on various priorities, including economic development, housing, human resources, and infrastructure.**

**Participants agreed that the conference provided "great networking opportunities for like-minded community builders."**

# Economic Development

One of the primary ingredients to ensure the vitality of rural communities is a strong economic base. Without a secure economy, businesses are not able to succeed and stay in rural Alberta. There are few opportunities for young people to build their futures in rural communities. And there are increasing challenges in attracting and keeping entrepreneurs, professionals and highly skilled employees. A focus on innovation, investment and new technologies, as well as on attracting and keeping people to work in existing and new industries will contribute to the long-term viability of rural communities. The provincial government is committed to helping rural Alberta identify and capitalize on opportunities that will contribute to a sustainable and profitable rural economy.

## Alberta's Progress

A new Energy Strategy will ensure this sector benefits all Albertans, including those in rural Alberta. Three new programs have already been launched or are being developed: the Bio-refining Commercialization and Market Development Program, the Bioenergy Infrastructure Development Program, and the Renewable Energy Producer Credit Program.

To maximize the contribution from Alberta's non-renewable resource base, work continues on developing guidelines to support Incremental Ethane Extraction Policy regulations. As well, the approval of projects under the Innovative Energy Technology Program increases existing reserves recovery. And implementation of the Hydrocarbon Upgrading Task Force recommendations increases value-added opportunities for bitumen as feedstocks for refining and petrochemicals.

The Alberta government continued to work with the Forintek Alliance to promote non-commodity forest products and provide market intelligence and technology transfer to improve manufacturing efficiency. It also continued to work with the Forest Engineering Research Institute of Canada to improve forest industry competitiveness by facilitating innovation in harvesting, tree utilization, reforestation, and log hauling.

The Government of Alberta provided $1.4 million to support the needs of the province's 12 Regional Economic Development Alliances and to develop two new ones. Five-year Memorandums of Understanding were established to provide management and advisory services and to outline annual funding amounts.

The province has worked closely with the Alberta Farmers' Market Association to increase their membership and programming. The association also received the support necessary to provide business development, leadership training, and regional training opportunities to its members. A home study course for farm direct marketers, Marketing Food Safely, was developed and distributed.

Business relationships between the food service industry and agricultural producers from across the province were facilitated as part of the Dine Alberta Project and Regional Cuisine Initiative. Alberta chefs purchased almost $575,000 of locally produced ingredients from the 180 producers participating in the project.

The Defence Industry Development Project helps rural Alberta capitalize on economic opportunities. Three of the province's Regional Economic Development Alliances are working together, representing almost 90 communities in southern and eastern Alberta, including Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake, Wainwright and Suffield. The Northeast Alberta Information Hub Ltd., Battle River Alliance for Economic Development Ltd. and Palliser Economic Partnership Ltd. have partnered to:

- capitalize on opportunities to supply goods and services to the Canadian Military,
- identify specific products or imported services that could be provided,
- champion private sector promotion, and
- attract foreign investment into the Eastern Alberta Defence Sector.

More than 250 communities received presentations on the economic opportunities provided by the film and television industry. Additionally, more than 100 communities have taken the "Film Friendly Best Practices Workshops" designed to help attract and host film productions from around the world.

In October 2006, the government hosted the second annual Alberta Tourism Investment Symposium in Edmonton. The symposium showcased market-ready tourism investment opportunities in 11 rural communities including Drumheller, Grande Prairie, Lacombe and Vegreville. Over 80 investors, hotel developers, franchisors, and tourism financiers attended the event which showcased investment opportunities such as hotels, resorts, ski hills, guest ranches, and more.

## Bad(lands) to the Bone

**Watch out for the rattlers in Horseshoe Canyon. At least, that's the rumour, when you visit one of the fascinating sites located in the Badlands of southern Alberta. With hoodoos and river valleys intermingled with UNESCO world heritage sites and quaint prairie villages, the region is rich with tourism opportunities.**

**The Canadian Badlands Initiative brings together over 40 municipalities to actively promote and develop the area's natural heritage and history, arts, culture, and western living.**

## German Cabinetmakers Settle in the West

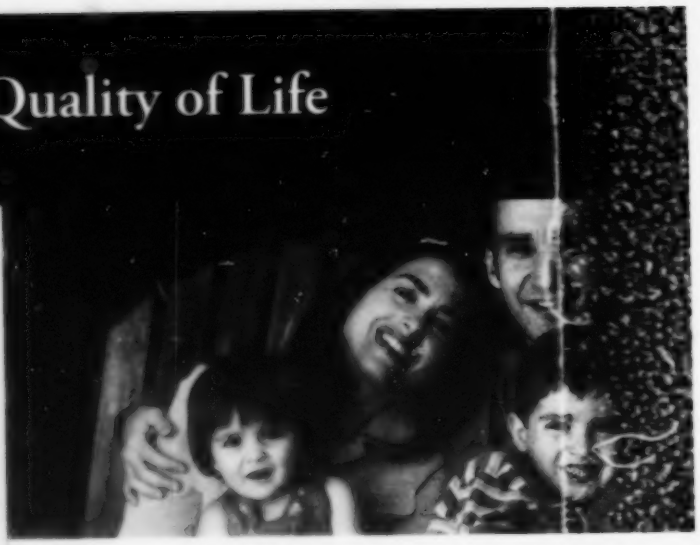
**Kitchen cabinetry is in great demand, as Alberta's housing industry continues to grow. Scarce also are the workers who are skilled enough to create it. Yet, a DeBolt business owner has discovered a solution.**

**"The Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) has allowed our business to remain viable in the current Alberta economy," said Peter Scharf, owner of P & G Kitchens located in the hamlet of DeBolt, 60 kilometres from Grande Prairie.**

**With a downtown population of only 56 people, Scharf was faced with a labour shortage for his company, until four German cabinetmakers arrived in town to work for him. "We would have had difficulty meeting customer demand, without our accredited and experienced foreign workers," Scharf added.**

**Last year, the Alberta PNP forwarded nearly 1,000 nominations to the federal government, for expedited permanent residency processing. Since the program's inception in 2002, almost half of the more than 1,900 foreign workers nominated by the program have been located outside of Edmonton and Calgary.**

# Community Capacity, Quality of Life and Infrastructure



Economic development and community capacity are directly linked. Quality of life is one of the critical factors businesses consider when deciding where to locate. Unless the necessary capacity, quality of life and infrastructure are in place in rural communities, it is unlikely they will be able to attract and retain new businesses and industries. Community growth and sustainability also relies on the capacity of rural organizations to adapt. The Alberta government recognizes rural organizations, and the leaders and volunteers that work for and with them, are central to achieving this. It also understands communities must be safe, secure, and have core physical infrastructure needs met. The rich history and culture of rural Alberta also contribute significantly to the quality of life in rural communities - opportunities to promote this are being nurtured.

## Alberta's Progress

As part of the Premier's commitment to provide municipalities with new long-term funding, the Municipal Sustainability Initiative was announced with a budget of $400 million in 2007-08, and increasing to $1.4 billion in 2010-11. This new funding includes incentives to encourage collaboration and co-operation between neighbouring municipalities, and will help municipalities throughout the province meet the challenges of growth and enhance their long-term sustainability.

Delivered in partnership with Alberta municipalities, the Municipal Internship Program for Administrators helps municipalities recruit and train capable, well-rounded leaders who can progress into senior municipal management positions. Grants of $34,000 were provided to 15 municipalities to host an intern for a 12-month period to learn about various aspects of municipal management including administration, finance, transportation, economic development, public works, and land use.

Rural municipalities received about $500 million, primarily through the Alberta Municipal Infrastructure Program, to develop core infrastructure such as roads, transit, and water and sewer systems.

A total of 965 kilometres of provincial highway were paved, contributing to the economic development of rural Alberta, and making rural Alberta a safer place to travel.

Through the Irrigation Rehabilitation Program, $24 million in cost-shared grants were provided to irrigation districts to assist in rehabilitating water distribution infrastructure in rural southern Alberta. Improvements made through the program allow districts to provide water for irrigation farming, communities, rural residences, industrial use, recreation, and wildlife habitat.

Over 2004-05 and 2005-06, the province provided $32 million to address police staffing and program issues in rural Alberta. The province's contracted provincial police service received approximately $22 million to hire over 200 new members. And $10 million funded approximately 80 municipal and RCMP policing positions that address specific issues such as drugs, gangs, and relationship violence in areas across the province.

The first phase of implementing 42 traffic sheriffs saw seven sheriffs deployed across the province. These new sheriffs are working with the RCMP and other enforcement agencies to improve traffic safety.

The province continued to move forward with the Alberta Traffic Safety Plan, developing programs designed to save lives and reduce injuries on provincial roadways.

The Alberta SuperNet continues to expand its reach to citizens and businesses, with over 200 of 402 rural communities now able to access high speed Internet services through Internet Service Providers across the province.

In support of library operations and life-long learning, $1.4 million was provided to cover the monthly charges to connect 279 public libraries to the Alberta SuperNet.

Alberta's *Fighting Back* report provides a province-wide, holistic approach to stop the abuse and negative effects of methamphetamine in Alberta. One of the report's 83 recommendations focuses on establishing a chemical thefts network in rural communities and ensuring farmers and rural communities are informed on best practices for fuel and chemical storage.

To address the impact of family violence in Alberta, eight specialized domestic violence courts have opened across the province. Early intervention is one of the key factors in reducing repeat offences in family violence cases and making early first appearances is very important – they are the court's opportunity to deal with family violence offences quickly and get offenders and victims the services they need sooner.

An additional $1.4 million was provided through the Family Justice Strategy to allow people to access family courts and related services more easily. This funding was used to create 20 new positions, 10 of which are in regional courts. These positions include Family Law Information Centre staff, court councillors, same day order clerks and case flow workers.

Law Information Centres were opened in Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and Edmonton to improve access to information for people acting on their own legal behalf before, during, and after their day in court. This is a pilot project and it is expected to increase the efficiency of the courts by reducing sitting times and increasing the number of cases heard.

The successful implementation of a provincial child care accreditation model has improved the quality of care children receive throughout Alberta. The Alberta Child Care Accreditation Funding Program provides financial support to child care programs and their staff to support quality programming, wage enhancements, and professional development. Other recent initiatives provide financial incentives to recruit back trained child care staff to the field and create more child care spaces in all regions of the province.

A network of 46 Parent Link Centres across Alberta exists and centres are located in school facilities wherever possible. In rural Alberta, 11 Parent Link Centres are located in schools.

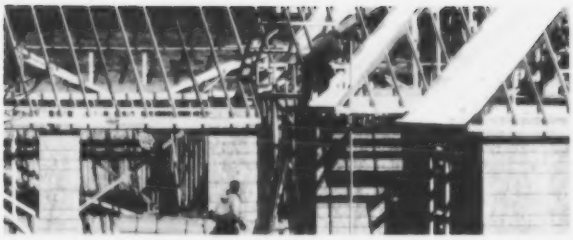
The Wild Rose Foundation's Quarterly Grants Program funded over $1.4 million in grants to support rural health, social service, and community service not-for-profit organizations that enhance quality of life.

## Makeover for Playgrounds and Community Centres

**Last year, Alberta Lottery Funding programs distributed over $32 million to rural communities, to help improve community-use facilities and to help support small capital initiatives.**

**Community halls and playgrounds in rural areas got a shot in the arm in 2006, through the Community Initiatives Program.**

**With grants of up to $75,000 per project, per year, funding was provided for community-based projects, including seniors' facilities, recreational centres, and cultural venues. The Everdell Community Centre Association in Rocky Mountain House used the money received for Community Hall upgrades, while the Drayton Valley Community Foundation built the Pocket Park Playground. Friends of the Thorhild Swimming Pool Association were able to purchase equipment and make repairs to the community's swimming pool.**



With one-time capital grant funding of $25 million to the Rural Affordable Housing Initiative, the Alberta government contributed to the development of 577 affordable housing units in areas outside Edmonton and Calgary in 2005-06. In recognition of the ongoing need for affordable housing in these areas, the province spent almost $31 million in support of the construction of 504 affordable housing units in 2006-07, assisting over 1,200 Albertans.

Through the Building Community Capacity Initiative, Persons with Developmental Disabilities community boards provided project funding to increase the inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities in community life. In some rural areas this funding represents a major contribution to the overall economy.

Almost 500 local, municipal, or regional projects were supported through government's Alberta Not-for-Profit Voluntary Sector Initiative. Projects addressed a variety of topics including strategic planning, board governance, issues management, and human resource strategies for the voluntary sector.

Grants totaling $13.5 million were awarded under the Municipal Sponsorship Program to municipalities with populations of 20,000 or less. The program provides grants for projects:

- promoting innovation, excellence, and co-operation in improving municipal governance or administration;
- enhancing municipal services or service delivery; and
- increasing inter-municipal co-operation.

The Ag Society Program provided $8.67 million in grants to agricultural societies across Alberta. The funding supports activities relating to building leadership, planning, infrastructure operations, agriculture, and empowerment in the community.

Alberta's Promise encourages communities, businesses, service clubs, foundations, and agencies to work together and direct more resources to benefit young Albertans. Rural-based partnerships under this initiative are supported through free fundraising and board governance workshops. In addition, a direct mail program increases awareness of partner agency causes and secures funding and in-kind support for these organizations. Alberta's Promise is also working to expand its reach into rural communities by developing a network to facilitate rural youth involvement in community activities.

## Prairie Culture and Inspiration

**Artists are teaming up with students. Jazz festivals and plays are being performed. Writers are finishing their novels. Last year, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts provided over 280 grants worth nearly $2 million to artistic endeavours in rural communities throughout the province, including: Beaverlodge, Bow Island, Hythe, Innisfail, Manning, Millet, Spirit River, St. Paul, Stettler, Vegreville, and Vulcan.**

**Projects included:**

- **Seventy-one school grants, providing support to professional artists working with students;**
- **Thirteen art festivals received financial support, bringing music, theatre, and visual arts experiences to rural Albertans;**
- **Fifty-one individual artists received support in the areas of professional development and creation of their art form.**

# Health Care

Access to high quality health care services is a top priority for Albertans. In rural Alberta, providing timely access to necessary health services is even more difficult. At the same time, rural communities face many challenges in ensuring availability of health providers and health services. As a critical pillar in the foundation for sustainable rural communities, the Government of Alberta has continued to make health care a priority in rural areas throughout the province.

## Alberta's Progress

Multi-year capital investments by the Alberta government in Information Management and Technology have produced several benefits in rural health regions. These include improvements in the quality of health data in all rural acute care centres, a reduction in the number of repeat diagnostic tests, and increased access to data by clinical providers at point of care.

The use of Health Link Alberta has continued to increase. The province-wide health information and triage telephone line is designed to help Albertans make appropriate and timely health, wellness, and care decisions. Callers can speak with a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week, who can answer questions and refer them to local programs and services.

Telehealth – using technology to support the delivery of health services at a distance – continued to be a priority. The Clinical Telehealth Innovation Program provides more than $3.4 million in new funding for 32 new projects over the next two years, with the Alberta government investing more than $1.7 million. Seven rural regions were given Telehealth Change Management Capacity grants in the amount of $700,000 to increase Telehealth usage and provide more opportunities for training, education, and professional development to rural practitioners.

Work began to develop an Alberta Framework for Aboriginal Health to address issues in a co-ordinated, collaborative, strategic manner. The Framework will serve as a guide for government, health service providers and Aboriginal stakeholders to undertake health planning, policy development, and service delivery initiatives with the goal of improving Aboriginal health outcomes.

Implemented in 2003 under the Alberta Diabetes Strategy, the Mobile Diabetes Screening Initiative currently provides outreach screening services for diabetes and related complications in 21 Aboriginal off-reserve and remote communities across northern Alberta.

The province provided more than $800,000 to the Alberta Dental Association and College to purchase two mobile dental clinics. These custom-built motor home clinics will be equipped with the latest technology for performing most dental treatments. The clinics will be operated by the college and will serve rural locations in central, southern and northern Alberta.

Eligible seniors received $54 million in financial assistance toward basic dental services through the Dental Assistance for Seniors Program. The Optical Assistance for Seniors Program spent $6.6 million helping seniors offset the cost of prescription eyeglasses.

The government released *Positive Futures: Optimizing Mental Health for Alberta's Children and Youth: A Framework for Action (2006-2016)*. The strategy supports a cross-government, cross sector, integrated approach to optimizing the mental health of children and youth from birth to 24 years old and their

families. The strategy aligns with the Provincial Mental Health Plan. One of the expected outcomes of the strategy is improving access to mental health services in rural communities.

Emergency medical services (EMS) were integrated into the health system of two rural health regions – Palliser Health Region and Peace Country Health – as part of discovery projects aimed at areas assessing the Regional Health Authority governance model of EMS in Alberta. Initial evaluation indicates that successes include greater utilization of paramedics in emergency departments and in providing support to home care, public health programs, and to residents. Integrated planning for EMS with the greater health system has resulted in improved access to health care in rural areas.

Education and training initiatives were put into action over the past year to emphasize rural experiences and encourage students in health programs to practice in rural Alberta after graduation. Initiatives included:

- bursaries for Aboriginal students pursuing a health-related career,
- bursaries for medical students,
- mandatory rotations to remote northern Alberta communities for dental students,
- ongoing funding for nurse practitioner programs, and
- funding for Emergency Medical Responder training for volunteer firefighters in rural Alberta communities.

Grants for $294,000 per year for three years were provided to each health authority to hire Regional Health Promotional Coordinators. The coordinators' role is to promote healthy eating and active living for children and youth by helping with the efforts of local and regional organizations, like school and health authorities, sport and recreation organizations, and community organizations.

In order to build mental health capacity in communities and reduce risks to optimal mental health in Alberta's children and youth, the Government of Alberta has invested $38.9 million over three years (2006-2009) for five children's mental health projects. These projects will promote mental well-being through action on suicide prevention, community training in mental health, and school-based mental health promotion and prevention services.

## A Healthy Workforce for Rural Alberta

**Alberta's Health Workforce Action Plan addresses current and future health workforce shortages through province-wide recruitment and retention strategies. These strategies include a focus on rural workforce needs, health service sector training needs, and the implementation of a Rural Action Plan for health professions other than physicians.**

**The Alberta government also continues to support the Rural Physician Action Plan, which is focused specifically on the education, recruitment, and retention of physicians in rural areas of the province.**

## Striking Back Against Stroke

**What are the five signs of a stroke? Strokes impact thousands of Alberta families each year. In 2007, the Alberta Provincial Stroke Strategy (APSS) launched a public awareness campaign, to help Albertans recognize the symptoms of stroke.**

**The APSS is a partnership between the Alberta government, the nine regional health authorities, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta. Its goals include reducing the rate of strokes, improving acute care treatment, and improving rehabilitation care. This initiative is supported by Telestroke, which links patients and specialists across the province.**

# Learning and Skill Development

Schools are the heart of rural communities. And just like parents in all parts of Alberta, parents in rural Alberta understand a good education is critical to the future of their children and their communities. The Government of Alberta is moving forward with initiatives encouraging young people from rural Alberta to attend college, technical institutes, university, or to enter an apprenticeship program – either by attending an institution or via distance education. Providing opportunities for people to upgrade and enhance their skills and knowledge, as well as expanding the availability of post-secondary education in rural communities are also priorities.

## Alberta's Progress

The Alberta government launched Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce, its 10-year labour force strategy with three main goals: more workers, better trained and educated people, and innovative work environments. Along with steering the overall implementation of the strategy, the government is working together with stakeholders on industry workforce strategies to address sector-specific labour force development needs.

A $5.7 million grant for One-to-One Mobile Computing Initiatives funded projects that enhanced teaching and learning for specific student populations or improved student learning in target areas. Twenty school jurisdictions are participating in three-year projects involving approximately 2,200 students, 160 teachers, and 50 schools. About two-thirds of the schools are rural.

LearnAlberta.ca was enhanced using SuperNet's broad bandwidth capacity to provide access to digital learning materials that are aligned with Alberta's K-12 curriculum. Students, teachers, and parents can use the site to find multi-media learning resources related to what the students are being taught.

The $5.3 million Lois Hole Alberta Digital Library Initiative was launched, allowing students from across the province instant access to a vast collection of research articles, textbooks, journals, images, and other learning resources.

Over 350 courses are currently offered to students across the province through eCampus Alberta, a group of 15 colleges and technical institutes facilitating increased access to high quality online learning opportunities. Each member institution develops, contributes, and shares online courseware.

As a result of a $6 million investment in 2005-06 to enable video-conferencing across Alberta's K-12 education system, each school jurisdiction now has a minimum of two video-conferencing locations. For small, rural or remote schools, this technology increases their ability to expand learning opportunities and program choices, such as additional language learning or teacher professional development.

Alberta-North received $530,000 so adult learners in small and isolated communities across northern Alberta can receive courses, programs, learning support, and educational services. Learners have access to a facility, educational technology, and a telecommunications network through 80 physical locations called Community Access Points.

The Renewed Funding Framework provided rural school boards with additional funds over and above base grants for provincial initiatives that address areas unique to rural communities such as enrolment decline, small schools by necessity, rural transportation, intra-jurisdictional distance, fuel price contingency, and Hutterite colony schools.

## Opening Doors for Rural Albertans

**The Government of Alberta is opening the door wide, to post-secondary education.**

**Alberta's Enrolment Planning Envelope created over 1,000 additional apprenticeship technical training seats at post-secondary institutions in rural Alberta. In addition, over 600 spaces were created in certificate, diploma, and degree programs.**

**Examples of educational opportunities include: practical nurse programs at Portage and Red Deer Colleges and increased capacity for rural and Aboriginal students in the University of Alberta's Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Dental Surgery programs.**

The province moved forward with the Affordability Framework to ensure post-secondary education is more affordable for all students. A new tuition fee policy was implemented limiting annual tuition increases and, in response to rural students, eliminating the use of vehicles as a financial resource in determining need for student financial assistance.

Advancing Futures Bursaries were provided to youth who are or were in government care to complete high school and undertake post secondary training and education. This past year, 403 young adults accessed Advancing Futures Bursaries. Of these, 78 were from rural Alberta, including Métis Settlements and reserve areas.

Six Aboriginal colleges received $1.2 million for targeted programming and $2 million for student bursaries through the First Nations College Access Grant Program. Scholarships benefiting First Nation and Métis students were supported, including over $340,000 in Aboriginal Health career bursaries and $55,000 for Belcourt-Brosseau Métis Awards, given to students attending post-secondary programs of study.

The Alberta government co-sponsored the CAREERS: The Next Generation initiative to promote careers in trades and technology and encourage employers to provide work experience opportunities for students.

Instead of the person coming to an office, the office comes to the person using a new Careers in Motion Bus. This "office on wheels" helps job seekers in remote Alberta locations explore careers, training, and post-secondary education options and opportunities, and learn how to write résumés.

Over $6 million was invested in employment and training programs and services for Aboriginal people in rural Alberta. These included the First Nations Training to Employment Program and a new Aboriginal Training to Employment Program which now accommodates over 800 participants in occupational training projects.

To help farm families develop new skills to meet the needs of an increasingly complex business environment, the Canadian Agriculture Skills Service provides Alberta farmers with financial support to cover the costs of training, books, and course fees.

## Maintaining Aboriginal Cultural Connections

**The Aboriginal Teacher Education Program helps to preserve and promote Aboriginal culture in Alberta. The program allows First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to complete their Bachelor of Education degree in Elementary Education, while maintaining community, family, and cultural connections.**

**Graduates from the program encourage greater understanding of the Aboriginal culture and perspective, primarily in schools where Aboriginal children are learning.**

**Funding for the program was $468,000 in 2006-07, and is expected to be twice that amount in 2007-08.**

# Environment

Stewardship of the province's environment and natural resources is a responsibility all Albertans share. But people in rural Alberta have a unique attachment to the land and a heightened interest in Alberta's environment. They understand, perhaps more than others, the value of sustaining Alberta's land and water resources for future generations. The provincial government is committed to protecting the province's air, land, and water and manages the use of Alberta's diverse landscapes to sustain a healthy environment, a prosperous economy, and strong communities.

## Alberta's Progress

The province provided $2.3 million to 59 rural municipalities and 17 agricultural groups through the Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Program. The program supported the delivery of 39 extension initiatives, facilitating the adoption of environmentally responsible farm management practices across Alberta.

A partnership between the province, the federal government and the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company helps farmers identify and address environmental risks and opportunities on their farms. In the past three years, over 6,000 environmental farm plans have been completed, that's about 11 million acres.

Municipalities received $10.6 million through the Ag Service Board Program for enforcement activities relating to the *Weed Control Act*, the *Agricultural Pests Act*, and the *Soil Conservation Act*. This funding was also used to deliver programs and services to rural residents to help them manage their agricultural and land resources.

In an effort to expand the province's groundwater monitoring network, approximately $3 million of the Energy Innovation Fund will be used to increase knowledge of groundwater resources and improve groundwater inventory, mapping and management in the province. The focus will be on areas where intense coalbed methane and oilsands development are anticipated.

To effectively manage groundwater resources throughout southern Alberta, a three-year study to identify, classify, and delineate aquifers was initiated. The results of the study will be compiled with other existing groundwater information in a central repository and made available on the Internet.

The Alberta Stewardship Network received $600,000 to administer the Watershed Stewardship Grant Program. The program, which is a key part of the Water for Life strategy implementation, helps watershed stewardship groups increase awareness of local watershed issues and improve local watershed conditions. The majority of watershed stewardship groups are rural or agriculturally focused.

A Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment of Alberta's communities was initiated to identify areas of the province that may be at risk from a changing climate. This will help identify possible short and long-term actions that will help rural Alberta respond to drought and other projected effects of climate change. This assessment will also contribute to updating the government's Climate Change Action Plan.

Over the next three years, $300,000 has been committed to assist the formation of the Alberta Land Trust Alliance. Land trusts work with private landowners to conserve nature in rural Alberta by protecting riparian areas, wetlands, or critical habitats for native species.

The Alberta government contributed $775,000 to assist with comprehensive air quality monitoring at over 40 monitoring stations in seven Clean Air Strategic Alliance Air Sheds throughout rural Alberta: Wood Buffalo, Peace River-Grand Prairie, Fort Saskatchewan, Edson-Hinton-Drayton Valley, Red Deer-Sundre-Rocky Mountain House, Cold Lake and Medicine Hat regions.

## Water for Life

Our water supply is predictably unpredictable, say experts.

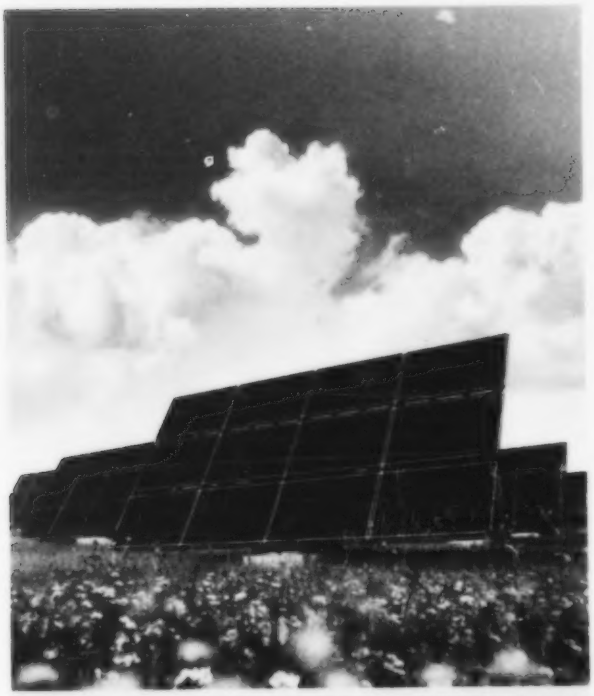
The Water For Life Operational Fund was created to ensure safe, secure supplies of water for Alberta's rural communities.

In addition to the $1.75 million a year fund, a new regional waterworks and wastewater grant program was created, to assist communities in developing sustainable wastewater collection and treatment systems.

Several pilot programs have been initiated, in order to build operational capacity in smaller Alberta communities.

For example, the Flagstaff Regional Operations Partnership Project was designed with the goal of developing an operational program template that would be used by the participating communities of Alliance, Bawlf, Daysland, Forestburg, Galahad, Hardisty, Heisler, Killam, Sedgewick, and Strome.

Through this partnership, these communities have become familiar with the operation of each system, thus improving regional drinking water safety.



## Solar Energy Solutions: A Shining Example

A Camrose High School student wants to minimize his school's ecological footprint.

By installing solar panels on the roof, the student is part of a group that is helping to reduce the school's dependence on conventional, unsustainable energy sources.

The group is working in conjunction with the Youth Environmental Stewardship Grant Program, which was established in partnership with the Alberta EcoTrust Foundation.

Fifty thousand dollars was available in the program's first year, providing rural and urban youth with grants up to $5,000 for initiating projects that support and promote environmental stewardship.

The solar panels are a strong example of environmental leadership, providing a great opportunity for the student to educate his peers on the importance of protecting the environment and conserving resources.

# Youth

Youth are an essential element in the vitality and sustainability of a rural community. Rural communities must offer what youth want: economic opportunities and access to services and amenities in order to attract and retain them. The Alberta government recognizes the importance of young people and is working with communities to make sure rural Alberta is an attractive place for youth to live, work, and play, and that youth in all areas of the province have opportunities to share their energy, ideas, and skills.

## Alberta's Progress

Established Youth Networks provide Child and Family Services Authorities with input into local program, policy, and business plan development. These networks also provide opportunities for youth leadership and development through community initiatives. Over 25 youth from rural areas are currently participating in the network groups.

Comprised of government ministries and community organizations, the Alberta Mentoring Partnership Leadership Team is developing strategies to encourage youth mentoring in communities across the province. Mentoring relationships often result in improved resiliency, social interactions, and positive behaviours among youth.

In October 2006, a provincial Youth Environment Summit was held in Kananaskis Country to support and motivate youth and better equip them to be environmental leaders. The summit included roundtables and keynote speakers. Youth from all areas of the province were invited.

The province initiated development of a planning protocol to guide the transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities. Stakeholder meetings were held in Calgary, Edmonton and Slave Lake. Distribution and education sessions are planned for 2007-08.

In partnership with provincial and federal agencies, communities and private businesses, the province facilitated the delivery of the Alberta's Future Leaders program to 11 Aboriginal communities. Opportunities were provided for youth to participate in summer sport and recreation programming, provincial leadership retreats, and arts camps.

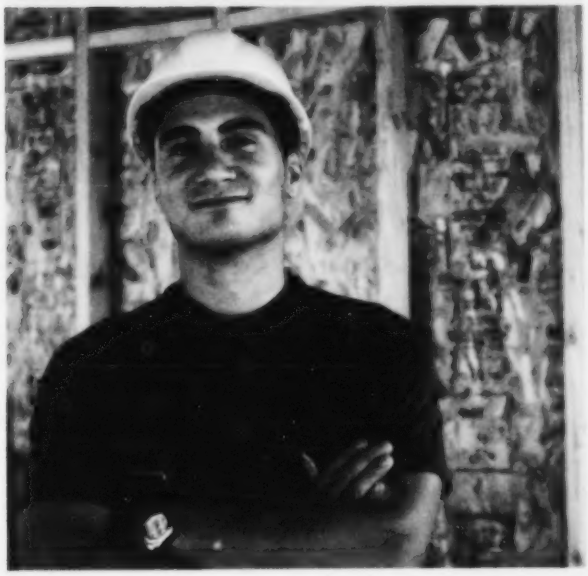
Leadership and personal development opportunities for youth were promoted through more than 20 Alberta 4-H Program conferences, communication competitions, workshops, and skill training events in local areas. The district Key Member program was also further developed and training was provided for adult leaders to continue their work with 4-H members across the province.

The Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy continued in pursuit of its objectives and its goal of helping Aboriginal youth to feel hopeful, empowered, and optimistic about their future. The strategy has five pilot sites involving 16 communities working to develop and implement their own community action plans for suicide prevention. Pilot sites include Lethbridge, Dene Tha', and Hobbema.

Resource materials were developed and distributed to increase awareness of workplace health and safety among young Alberta workers. Materials included a Work Safe Passport to record recognized workplace health and safety training received by students and workers; X-Treme Safety: A Survival Guide for New and Young Workers; and a Young Worker Poster Series called "What Are You Working For?"

## Connecting Youth to the Labour Market

**Young rural Albertans can visit one of 37 Youth Connection Centres across the province, to gain valuable information on employment and training-related services. Over $6 million was provided for the operation of these centres. Youth can find out about labour market information, career counselling, job search services, and education options. The centres also connect them to potential employers.**



The Ag Education Program received $272,000 to foster awareness and understanding of agriculture, encouraging youth to consider career options in the agriculture industry and make responsible decisions regarding the industry. The program facilitates the development of agriculture-related curriculum as well as the design and distribution of resources for K-12 educators in over 1,000 Alberta schools.

The Green Certificate Program received $663,000 to provide students with opportunities to enter a variety of agriculture-related, structured learning pathways as a part of their senior high school credits. The apprenticeship-style program allows students to learn on the job. Over 800 young people across the province are currently enrolled in the program.

Improvements were made to the Learner Career Pathways Initiative helping young people across the province pursue career and lifelong learning opportunities. Four new career clusters allow junior high students to explore further education options and careers through focused learning experiences. Eight new career clusters offered during high school are more specific and prepare students to move smoothly through school to future education and satisfying work.

This past year marked the half-way point of a six year pilot of the Youth Apprenticeship Program in three rural jurisdictions: Wabasca-Desmarais, Lac La Biche and High Prairie. The program helps students in Grades 7 through 12 receive hands-on learning opportunities in school through worksite visits and placements. The Government of Alberta provides a total of approximately $250,000 each year for this pilot.

The province continued to support Alberta's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), allowing full-time high school students to earn credit toward a high school diploma and an apprenticeship program at the same time. In 2006-07, approximately $5.8 million was provided to school jurisdictions to support enrolled students and $50,000 was allocated for RAP scholarships.

## Young People's Opinions Matter!

**A youthful perspective provides important information to the Alberta government. The Youth Advisory Panel is comprised of young people from across the province, including half from rural communities. The panel provides critical input on issues, policies, and programming relating to youth.**

# Seniors

Rural communities tend to have higher proportions of seniors. Seniors play very important roles in rural communities; they are active volunteers in a wide range of community activities and projects and provide considerable supports to their families and friends. They also provide an ongoing linkage between the past and future. Seniors have contributed much of their lives to raising their families, building and supporting business and community opportunities, and preserving the rural way of life. These activities and actions often continue long into their senior years through the sharing of their knowledge, skills, and talents with their communities. The province supports seniors with a variety of policies, programs, and services.

## Alberta's Progress

New Continuing Care Accommodation Standards were introduced for all continuing care operators, including long-term care facilities and supportive living facilities in both rural and urban areas. The standards will increase consistency in the quality of accommodation services by addressing building cleanliness and maintenance, safety and security, and food preparation and laundry.

This past year, 128 seniors lodges in 107 communities across the province received $20.9 million for urgent maintenance and necessary upgrades through the Lodge Assistance Program.

The introduction of Continuing Care Health Service Standards will improve the quality of care and quality of life of continuing care clients by addressing areas such as individualized care planning, staff qualifications, and medication management. These standards apply to all publicly funded health and personal care services provided in long-term care facilities, supportive living settings, and through home care programs.

In May 2007, the Alberta government removed the $3,000 monthly funding ceiling on home care services. In addition to allowing health regions greater flexibility in the provision of home care services, this change particularly benefits self-managed home care clients, who hire health care aides on their own and often face financial difficulties in getting their care needs met. Removal of the ceiling helps more clients stay in their homes, and in the community while receiving care.

Seniors Information Services Offices located in Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, St. Paul, and Stony Plain provide seniors with information on provincial programs, services, and supports through presentations, displays, and regional workshops. The Seniors Information Line is a toll-free service which provides detailed information on a wide range of programs, including referrals to local programs, for seniors throughout the province.

The Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Transportation promotes barrier free transportation for all Albertans, including seniors in rural areas. The Advisory Committee led a review of the parking placards for persons with disabilities policy in 2006-07. In previous years, the Committee facilitated the development of guides and toolkits to assist accessible transportation service providers. Workshops were also held in rural communities to encourage the development of accessible transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities.

In early 2007, the Alberta government participated in a joint federal, provincial, and territorial Age Friendly Rural

Remote Communities Initiative. The intent was to identify best practices and hallmarks of communities providing supportive environments to seniors. Results will be used to produce a practical guide that rural and remote communities can use to become more age-friendly. In Alberta, High Prairie was selected as the community for the research study.

The Alberta Seniors Benefit program provided $255 million in monthly cash payments to eligible low-income seniors throughout Alberta.

Senior homeowners received $3.7 million under the Education Property Tax Assistance for Seniors program. The program covers the increase in the education portion of seniors' property taxes and is available to seniors throughout the province.

The Special Needs Assistance for Seniors program provides lump-sum cash payments to eligible low-income seniors to assist with allowable one-time or extraordinary expenses such as appliances, minor home repairs and some medical expenses. Seniors in Alberta received $18.8 million under this program.

## Better Service for Northern Seniors

**Seniors living in Alberta's north face unique challenges in finding information. Since September 2006, a new service delivery model has been in place on a pilot basis in northeastern Alberta, enabling seniors to access information in their communities.**

**Through partnerships with local organizations and service providers, seniors have additional points of contact to locate the information they need on services and resources, as well as access to forms.**

## A Rural Option for Seniors

**Alberta's rural seniors would prefer to continue living in their communities as they age. Last year, the Rural Affordable Supportive Living Program provided $39.7 million to develop affordable supportive living accommodations for seniors who live outside of Edmonton and Calgary.**

**A good project example is the Shepherds Care Foundation's assisted living facility located in Barrhead that allows older residents to remain in their community instead of moving to an urban centre.**

**"Our goal was to create an assisted living model that provided quality care," said John Pray, president of Shepherds Care Foundation.**

**Pray says the project 'couldn't have gone any better.' "We opened in January, and now we're filled to capacity, with 43 residents," he said.**

**The project was developed in partnership with the provincial government, regional health authorities and voluntary, private sector, or local community organizations. "The town of Barrhead was phenomenal," Pray added. "This was a good example of everyone working together, for the betterment of seniors."**

# Aboriginal People

Alberta's Aboriginal population is the youngest and fastest growing population in the province. Many Aboriginal Albertans live in rural communities or count on neighbouring towns as their major centres for business and trade. They are interested in preserving their cultural and community heritage and preserving the environment. They are interested in building strong economies and opportunities for their young people. And because of the growing population of Aboriginal Albertans, their voice and their aspirations for rural communities will be even more important in the years to come. The Alberta government has implemented a variety of initiatives to facilitate the participation of Aboriginal Albertans in rurai development opportunities across the province.

## Alberta's Progress

This past year marked the beginning of revisions to a series of 20-year-old framework agreements between Alberta and the Métis Nation of Alberta Association. These agreements facilitate the relationship between the parties, assist the association in building capacity, and provide increased access to the Government of Alberta.

In November 2006, the Alberta government hosted the first-ever National Aboriginal Disabilities Conference. The conference provided Aboriginal persons with disabilities and their caregivers with information, resources, and tools to organize and create hope and help within their own communities.

The Aboriginal Mentoring Pilot Project worked to increase the number of Aboriginal mentors and children and youth receiving mentoring and to learn more about how mentoring works in Aboriginal communities. Two rural pilot sites involved in this project are Kainaiwa Children's Services, located on the Blood Tribe in southern Alberta, and Paul First Nation in northern Alberta.

A toolkit was developed to assist municipalities in developing and enhancing relationships with Aboriginal communities, and to provide effective local services to Aboriginal people resident within a municipality. This support is provided through the Municipal-Aboriginal Relationships Action Forum, a committee of municipal and Aboriginal officials.

The province partnered with the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association and the 20 Alberta Native Friendship Centres to support Friendship Centre Capacity Building Initiatives. These initiatives aim to strengthen organizational capacity through the development of strategic business plans which in turn create new partnerships and develop organizational efficiencies. Approximately $800,000 was provided for operational support and projects.

The First Nation Economic Partnership Initiative helps First Nations identify, plan, and implement economic development projects and partnerships with industry. The initiative has resulted in stronger relationships and increased partnerships between First Nations and industry, as well as effective, sustainable capacity building at the community and regional levels. In 2006-07, the Alberta government provided over $5 million to administer seven programs under the initiative:

- Aboriginal Business Advisory Services provides Aboriginal entrepreneurs with access to business counseling and planning, as well as training and mentoring opportunities. Alberta has worked with a number of organizations under this program including Settlement Investment Corporation, Treaty Seven Economic Development

Corporation, Alberta Indian Investment Corporation, and Apeetogosan (Métis) Development Inc.

- Aboriginal Community Development Services provides Aboriginal awareness training to enhance relationships with Aboriginal communities. It also supports Aboriginal communities to work with others to identify and jointly pursue business venture opportunities. This past year eight Aboriginal Awareness Training sessions and two Recruiting & Retaining an Aboriginal Workforce sessions were held across the province.
- Aboriginal Business Information and Resources provides strategic business information and resources, conference support, and encourages pilot projects benefiting Aboriginal entrepreneurs, including youth. Through this initiative the province has supported the Métis Settlement General Council in acquiring the capacity to develop planning documents and identify potential economic development projects.
- First Nations Labour Force Planning Initiative supports the completion of human resource development plans at the regional and local levels. Potential project areas include community skills inventories, identification of local employer and industry activities, integration of human resource services, and database development.
- Strategic Economic Initiatives funds projects directly promoting economic capacity building of First Nations, and that demonstrate strategic value and establish sustainable partnerships with other stakeholders, such as government or industry. Under this program, the Enoch Cree Nation has partnered with the Integrated Office Group. This partnership will develop a strategic economic plan to create training and employment opportunities for community members.
- Regional Partnership Development provides funding to Tribal Councils and those First Nations not affiliated with Tribal Councils to hire a Regional Economic Partnership Coordinator. The role of the coordinator is to facilitate and support economic opportunities and First Nations/Industry partnerships in the region. Currently, 13 coordinators are employed by Aboriginal organizations throughout Alberta.
- Economic Capacity Building helps First Nations to implement economic development initiatives by establishing learning networks, sharing of best practices, and developing and using training tools.

## From Mainframe to Autoframe

**With assistance from the Economic Capacity Building program, the Sunchild E-learning Community plans to develop an online accredited youth automotives apprenticeship program. The Sunchild First Nation Youth Council will participate in the program to gain the necessary skills and qualifications for establishing and operating an auto repair business on the reserve.**

## Improving Aboriginal Socio-Economic Opportunities

**Enhanced clarity of roles and responsibilities of federal, provincial, and Aboriginal governments and communities are some of the outcomes produced by the Building Aboriginal Self-Sufficiency Initiative.**

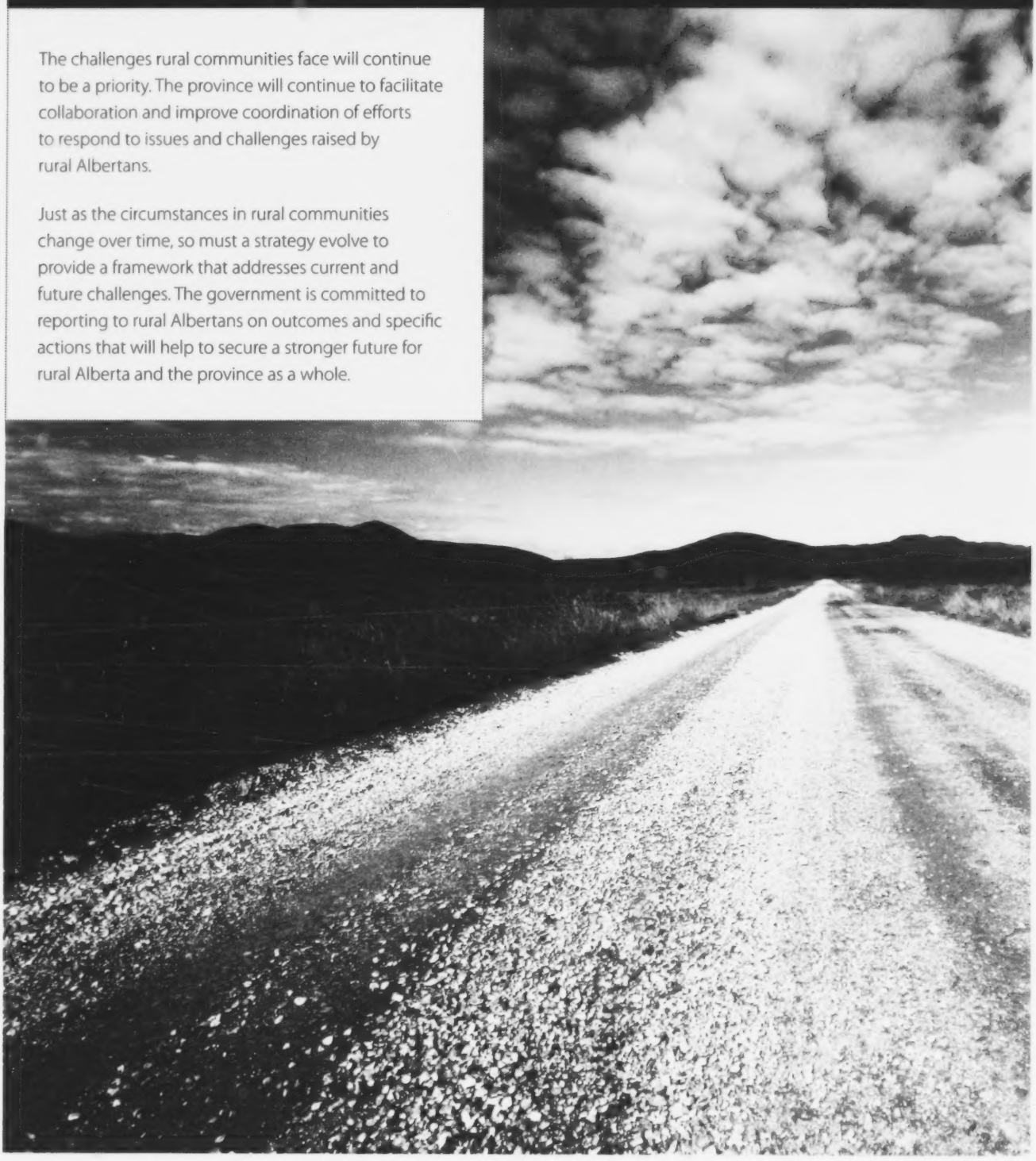
**For example, the Province of Alberta and the Government of Canada, along with Shell Canada and the Fort McKay First Nation are all working together to create regulations for commercial and industrial development.**

**As well, they're drafting an inter-governmental agreement that will allow Shell and Fort McKay to develop oil sands on First Nation lands lying adjacent to the Shell Firebag development.**

# Next Steps

The challenges rural communities face will continue to be a priority. The province will continue to facilitate collaboration and improve coordination of efforts to respond to issues and challenges raised by rural Albertans.

Just as the circumstances in rural communities change over time, so must a strategy evolve to provide a framework that addresses current and future challenges. The government is committed to reporting to rural Albertans on outcomes and specific actions that will help to secure a stronger future for rural Alberta and the province as a whole.



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